

# NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT

Newark Abbey

520 King Boulevard, Newark, NJ 07102

**For Immediate Release:** March 8, 2001

Contact: Paul Thornton (973) 792-5775 / Fax (973) 643-6922

S. Teresa Shaw, S.S.J. (973) 792-5799

## **New St. Mary School to Be Built; Groundbreaking on March 23, 2001**

**Newark**—St. Mary School, one of Newark's oldest and longest-serving Catholic elementary schools, will hold a ceremonial groundbreaking for its new school building on Friday, March 23, 2001, at 10 A.M. Most Rev. Paul G. Bootkoski, the Administrator of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newark, will preside at the ceremony. Numerous civic, church and school officials, including Mayor Sharpe James, Congressman Donald Payne, and Senator Jon Corzine, have been invited to attend.

The new St. Mary School is one of the few new Catholic grade school buildings being built in the Greater Newark metropolitan area. It is being developed and funded as part of the new Campaign for St. Benedict's Prep, in part to allow St. Benedict's Prep to regain full use of its oldest classroom building, which has been shared by the students of St Mary School since 1972. The 22,000 square foot building, housing classrooms, offices, and multi-use space will be situated on William Street, on property recently used for St. Benedict's tennis courts.

Abbot Melvin J. Valvano, O.S.B., of Newark Abbey, whose mission includes St. Mary Church and support of St. Mary School as well as St. Benedict's Prep as part of its educational work in Newark, stated that "the new school building is the

-- more --

latest affirmation of our historic commitment to serving the educational needs of Newark youngsters. We are pleased that we can now provide a more appropriately-designed space for the youngest students who come to school here.”

St. Mary School began in 1843 with 40 students, as the first German Catholic parochial school in New Jersey, in the basement of the first St. Mary Church building. By 1857, the school moved to the basement of the convent then on High Street, which housed the Benedictine Sisters who originally staffed the fledgling school. In 1863, the parish of St. Mary’s built a redbrick building for the school on William Street, a building that still stands and has been incorporated into St. Benedict's Prep.

Over its 150-year life, St. Mary School, like its better known “relation,” St. Benedict's Prep, has served the numerous ethnic groups which immigrated to Newark. The school’s original German students were followed by children of Irish and Eastern European groups. In the most recent decades its 250 students have come primarily from African- heritage backgrounds, with growing numbers of children of West African families. 60% of its students come from Newark, with 35% coming from Irvington, East Orange, and Orange. Since 1968 the school has been administered and staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill, PA.

The new St. Mary School building was designed by Heintz and Fiore, Architects, of Millburn, NJ. It will be built by the Whiting-Turner Contracting Company of Baltimore, MD, which recently completed St. Benedict’s new Leahy House, its first student residence. The \$4.2 million construction cost is being financed through bonds issued by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, which will be retired through funds raised by Newark Abbey and St. Benedict's Prep.

#####